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Chapter Four: *Suryŏn* in the narrations of the practitioners

4.1 GiCheon as *suryŏn*

In previous chapters I have outlined the conceptual framework of technologies of self as elaborated by Foucault, the way technologies of self are approached in contemporary scholarship, and the notions of *ki suryŏn* and *ki*. In this chapter I will focus on the notion of *suryŏn* (修練 self-cultivation/training). It is often referred to by the interviewees as being central to GiCheon, and associated with the process and the goal of self-transformation. The word *suryŏn* (修練) consists of two characters: *su* (修) – to cultivate, to study, to discipline; and *ryŏn* (練) – to polish, to practice, to exercise. The term *suryŏn*, translated by Isabelle Robinet into English as “cultivation and refinement”, is not of recent origin and already forms a part of the title of *Xiulian xuzhi* (修練須知 Required Knowledge on Cultivation and Refinement), an anonymous work which is a part of the Taoist Canon (Robinet 2008a: 557).⁶² In contemporary vernacular Korean, the term *suryŏn* is commonly used in the context of training of both the mind and the body, life-long dedication, whole-hearted acceptance and constant diligent practice. *Ki suryŏn* adepts of various affiliations and lineages often use this term.

The interview material presented in this chapter shows that the notion of *suryŏn* arises often in the narratives of GiCheon practitioners. Adherents of GiCheon also use the words *suyang* (修養 personal improvement) and *suhaeng* (修行 practice) in a meaning

⁶² Modern editions of the Taoist Canon (道藏 *Daozang*) are based on the Ming Canon of 1445, which, in turn, is based on the catalogues of Taoist writings prepared more than a millennium earlier (Boltz 2008: 28).

similar to *suryŏn*.⁶³ While many trainees understand GiCheon practice as *suryŏn* (self-cultivation), others assert that it should be categorized as *undong* (運動 sports). As I discuss also in Chapters Three and Five, this difference in understanding relates to the position of the trainees in GiCheon circles. Those close to the core of GiCheon community, who have to a significant degree interiorized the ideology, define GiCheon as *suryŏn*, while those at the periphery label GiCheon as sports. Even the former group however sometimes intentionally refer to GiCheon as *undong* and not as *suryŏn*, because the term *suryŏn*, which implies deeper meaning, might scare people away, as evidenced by an extract from the interview with Chang Namju, a robot engineer in his late twenties, in section 4.3 of this chapter.⁶⁴ Chang believes that the word *suryŏn* possesses some special meaning in the eyes of many non GiCheon-practicing individuals.

When analyzing the understanding of *suryŏn* in the interviews of the practitioners, I interpret it as connecting directly to self-consciousness, self-understanding and self-construction. The sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 discuss three examples of self-building as articulated by Cho Chinsik, a GiCheon instructor in his early thirties, a university student, Kim Yŏnghŭi, in her early twenties, and a bank team manager, Pak Kyŏngae, in her early fifties.⁶⁵ In the sections 4.5 and 4.6 I discuss short extracts from the interviews with Kwŏn Kuho, a businessman in his late fifties, and Kim Yŏngbo, a man in his early fifties working in retail business.⁶⁶ I analyze the way Cho Chinsik, Kim Yŏnghŭi, Pak Kyŏngae, Kwŏn Kuho and Kim Yŏngbo talk about *suryŏn*, and the meanings this term holds for each of them. In

⁶³ See Chapter Six on GiCheon as ascetic practice.

⁶⁴ Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Chang Namju gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

⁶⁵ Interview with Cho Chinsik, 07.03.2011, Seoul, South Korea. Cho Chinsik gave me explicit permission to use his real name. Interview with Kim Yŏnghŭi (not a real name), 05.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Interview with Pak Kyŏngae (not a real name) 17.01.2010, Seoul, South Korea.

⁶⁶ Interview of 16.11.2010, Seoul, South Korea. Kwŏn Kuho gave me explicit permission to use his real name. Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Kim Yŏngbo gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

section 4.2 I also introduce a few extracts from the interviews with Yi T'aegyŏng, a man in his early thirties working in ship-building, which support the interpretation of *suryŏn* held by Cho Chinsik.⁶⁷ In section 4.6 I mention briefly how the social aspect of *suryŏn* is explained in GiCheon theory and texts, as this point is especially highlighted by Kim Yŏngbo.

4.2 *Suryŏn* as self-knowledge passed on to others

Let us start with an extract from the interview with Cho Chinsik:

First of all, [...] I started looking at my habits and observing the patterns [of my actions]. My [GiCheon] suryŏn became a chance to observe the habits and patterns connected to my body [...] that were wrong. [...]. For example, when I was training [...], other people were also practicing [behind me], those who came six months ago, and I just came less than a month ago. [...] And I thought that I could not perform the exercises in a way that I perceived as successful or well. When you cannot achieve something in this way, you should try harder, you should show more [effort], but [instead of doing this] ... when the teacher Kim Hŭisang came to me, my facial expression demonstrated [to him] everything [I felt internally and he said] “what is the problem?” [I replied] “I cannot do that well”.⁶⁸ When the teacher responded “no one can do that well in the beginning”, I had a moment of sudden awakening. My reason for coming here [...] is not to demonstrate anything [to anyone], [...] but to develop some space in my mind-heart.⁶⁹ At this point my previous habits [of perception] became visible [to me]. [...]

When his teacher, Kim Hŭisang, remarked that *no one can do that well in the beginning*, Cho became conscious of his old behavioral pattern and realized that impressing

⁶⁷ Interview of 09.12.2010, Pusan, South Korea. Yi T'aegyŏng gave me explicit permission to use his real name.

⁶⁸ Kim Hŭisang was a well-known GiCheon leader, as I briefly mentioned in the Introduction.

⁶⁹ The translation of a Korean word *maŭm* into English as “mind-heart” reflects the thinking of the practitioners. *Maŭm* can indicate both the mind and what in English is referred to as “heart”, that is both mental faculties and feelings.

others with his practice had been his purpose. Cho Chinsik also realized that it didn't have to be that way and that a better motivational strategy would be “practicing for yourself” rather than “practicing to impress others”. His reason for practice was thereby altered into what he expressed as *getting some space in my mind-heart*. We might categorize Cho's experience as that of a rediscovery of motivation, as he begins practicing for himself and not for others.

According to Cho, through GiCheon practice his self was modified. His teacher's remark revealed the nature of Cho's “old self”, and at that instant a “new” self emerged. The moment of self-visibility is thus the moment of self-transfiguration. When I see my old self, my old self fails, and a new self is born. In a metaphorical way we could express it as “dying” or “annihilation” of the old self. The old self dies when it is perceived, brought into awareness, revealed.

An important point here is the presence of the “Other”. For Cho Chinsik old habits and behavioral patterns only became observable when the Other, his teacher, intervened and asked “what's the problem?” At that moment Cho realized that what he (Cho) wanted was to look competent in the eyes of other people. The Other – a teacher, a friend, a co-practitioner – has a key role to play in the transformation of the self. The Other serves as a mirror, revealing our self to us. Now, similarly to his teacher, Cho Chinsik plays the role of the Other in his interaction with his own students, as he relates in the following extract from his interview.

[I tell my students] “in suryŏn, do not look at me, but instead look at yourself”. These people [...] are very self-conscious and conscious of others, so ...they want to make themselves perfect and dislike criticism. So [...] in the beginning, they are very conscious of the teacher and the people around. After some time passes, I begin to tell them to focus on themselves. When they do so and start to focus primarily on themselves, from that moment they become chuch'e (주체 subjects) for themselves [...]. But they do not gain this knowledge by themselves. [...] This is my story [...]. These people, similarly to me, grew up in a different

environment [from mine] but [they] tend to be similar to me [...], there are many people like that. [...]

In his narrative Cho Chinsik describes a certain type of people whom he terms “perfectionists”. These people are usually very conscious of themselves and of others and whatever they do, they aspire to perfection and detest criticism. When they come to a GiCheon studio and perform exercises, their main goal (of which they are most likely unaware) is to show others that they “can do it well” and to impress others. Cho Chin-sik counts himself among these people. Cho’s comment *there are many people like that* hints that the desire for self-promotion through one’s performance and sensitivity to social pressure are marked characteristics of contemporary South Korean society.

After turning into a teacher, when encountering students with similar issues to those he confronted in the past, Cho attempts to reconstruct his own pedagogic experience with Kim Hŭi-sang, his own teacher. But the roles have shifted: Cho now seeks to carry out for others the role Kim Hŭisang played for Cho. Cho stands in the place of Kim Hŭisang, while Cho’s students come to stand in the shoes of Cho himself: Cho Chinsik wishes to deliver to them the message Kim Hŭisang had administered to him. The essence of his role is provoking a transformation of the students’ own subjectivity and inducing them to perform GiCheon positions for themselves rather than for others. Cho Chinsik uses the Korean word *chuch’e* when he says that *from that moment they [the students] become subjects for themselves*. Cho Chinsik tries to encourage the process of subjectivation in his students.⁷⁰

So, now [it is] not the idea of undong that categorizes GiCheon, but suryŏn, suhaeng, that concept. ... I had many different experiences. So it was through suryŏn [...] that the experiences I accumulated through my lifetime [...] became organized and ordered. That was

⁷⁰ As mentioned in the Introduction, I suggest that the concept of subjectivation introduced by Michel Foucault can be very useful in analysis of contemporary *ki suryŏn*. The fact that GiCheon practitioners themselves use the ideas of “subjectivity”, in the sense it is also used in the name of North Korea’s *chuch’e* (주체) ideology, supports my suggestion.

that ... [I realized]. [...] Through continuous *suryōn*, I started observing myself and my way of thinking.

For Cho, *suryōn* is the road to seeing himself, and by developing awareness of his old habits and aspirations, to modifying his self. In order to better illustrate the aspect of *suryōn* that relates to self-knowledge as leading to self-modification, I will bring up an extract of an interview with another GiCheon practitioner, Yi T'aegyōng:

- Do you have a religion?

- Buddhism.

- How do GiCheon and Buddhism relate to each other in your mind-heart?

- I think they are *suryōn*, and I wish to practice them my whole life.

- You think that both Buddhism and GiCheon are *suryōn*?

- Yes. [...] In GiCheon we feel [...] through the body, in Buddhism we [...] manage the mind-heart. [...] These two things support each other [...]. In Buddhism [...] the mind-heart comes first [...], but in GiCheon it is through our *kiun* (기운) [...].⁷¹ After doing *suryōn* [...], I felt that [...] I have used my body in [...] a wrong way. [As a result of the practice] parts [of the body] get more flexible, relax little by little. [Parts of the body that were] stiff, [...] open up a bit. [...] I learned a lot about my own body [...]. In the old days I just did not know, [so] I thought I should just go to the hospital. [Now I realize that] this is not good. In the hospital [...] you take lots of medicines and the pain is gone for a moment, but I think that the pain is [just] lying dormant. [...]

Both Yi T'aegyōng and Cho Chinsik see *suryōn* as bringing self-knowledge. First of all, this self-learning relates to the bodily self. *GiCheon practice became a chance to observe the habits and patterns connected to my body that were wrong*, says Cho. However, Cho does

⁷¹ Yi T'aegyōng uses the word *kiun* here in the sense of *ki*. Cf. my elaborations on the meaning of *ki* in Chapter Three.

not elaborate in detail on his bodily habits. Instead, he describes his behavior habit of “looking competent in the eyes of the others”. Unlike Cho, Yi gives a more detailed account on what happened in his body: *[As a result of the practice] parts [of the body] get more flexible, relax little by little. [Parts of the body that were] stiff, [...] open up a bit.*

We could compare “relaxation and opening up of the body” described by Yi to the “relaxation and opening up of the mind-heart” discussed by Cho. The tension Cho felt when he found himself under a constant pressure to *perform well and look well in the eyes of others* was later relieved, which he refers to as *developing some space in my mind-heart*. Cho’s language indicates inner ease and letting go, a reduction of pressure. We could therefore see the accounts of Yi and Cho as supplementing and interpreting each other, pointing out that the narratives of GiCheon practitioners, often so different, have important common points. Another idea that Yi and Cho share is “awakening”. Let us consider the following extract from the interview with Yi T’aegyŏng.

- *What is suhaeng or suryŏn?*

- *Suhaeng and suryŏn are the same thing, I think.*

- *So what is it?*

- *[...] Suhaeng is the way to kkaedarŭm (깨달음 awakening). [...] Through suryŏn I realized “I should live like that!” [...]. Sometimes, without me knowing, if I become greedy, for example, it can be like suddenly falling down, [straying from the correct path]. [...]. [Through suryŏn] I can solve the problem of these [dangerous] moments with more wisdom, so I wish to practice for a lifetime.*

Both Yi and Cho relate self-learning also to the cognitive self. We have seen how Cho describes the moment he suddenly became aware of his old behavioral patterns. Yi T’aegyŏng likewise connects *suryŏn* to awareness or awakening. Yi uses the word *kkaedarŭm*, which can also be translated as “enlightenment”. *Kkaedarŭm*, enlightenment, is

another key word used in Korean society, the usage of which is not limited to Buddhist discourse. *Kkaedarūm* is utilized as in describing religious or spiritual experiences, so in ordinary speech means “awakening” or “awareness”. *Suryōn* lets Yi become aware of how he should live. In relation to the mind-heart, Yi talks about the danger of becoming greedy, mentioning that *suryōn* means observing this, discovering this and preventing it from taking over. The moments of awareness of Yi and Cho make them look back and see their pasts in a new light.

For Cho and Yi *suryōn* is self-learning that brings about self-alteration, modification of the self. Many adherents perceive the practice of GiCheon as an act of re-making the self. Here we come to another key element of self-transformation, which continues the motif of looking back, at the old, pre-modified self. In order to re-make ourselves we have to go back, to the place where we started. Many practitioners say that the training makes them recall their childhood, for example this is how an image of a toddler is evoked by Cho Chinsik: *When I was learning GiCheon steps, [...] I thought that it is like I was learning to walk as a kid. Accordingly, when the teacher says “do this, do that”, I become a young child.*

The self is an important concept in the narration of Cho. He uses the Korean word *chagi* (자기) for the self and while he does not give a definition of the self, the meaning of his narration is clear: *The important thing is, that the “self” enters there. I chose it [suryōn] myself, and I found it myself. GiCheon is a fixed practice: “you have to do like this”. People do it, and if the position becomes wrong, we say that it is a mistake [you have to correct] but, if I, on the contrary, make [the student] choose [the way she wants to perform] the position... I adjust the position, if I lower the position, more power is generated; if I raise the position, you get more space to breath. [As a teacher] you have to let the students themselves opt for the degree of hardness in suryōn. [If] the teacher [says] “this is how you do that”, it might become a torture for the student. From the point of view of the body, physically, it might be*

effective, but if the “self falls out” [the student] cannot practice [alone] at home. However, if the student regulates the training by herself, she will practice at home even if you don’t tell her. The self for Cho Chinsik is an independent agent capable of acting freely and of making choices. If you are forced to practice GiCheon against your will, it might contribute to your health, but the *self falls out*: you are no longer an agent actualizing your free choice.

The story of Cho Chinsik relates to different selves on the vectors, but mainly to the cognitive, the individual and the social self. The focus of his narrative is the conscious realization of who he was and how he came to be like that – that is analyzing the presence of the second vector in his life and revealing that he was motivated by the desire to *look good in the eyes of other people*. The narrative of Cho provides a good example of the second vector working, the vector of societal and environmental influence surrounding an individual. Cho further contemplates on who it is that he wants to be, and how to awaken a similar realization in others. In his relationship with his students the self of Cho is his social self on the first vector: he is bringing about the change not just in himself, but in the selves of other people, in a way placing them within the boundaries of his responsibility. The first vector in my two vectors model signifies intentions, desires and actions coming from within the self and unfolding toward the outside. Cho develops the social self of his students and attempts to instill in them particular characteristics, activating the first vector not just in his self, but also in others. This is an example of the self expanding like contracting circles on the water, starting from the personal self (Cho) and continuing toward his GiCheon social self, which includes his students. His idea of freedom relates to multiple selves on the first vector: for the intentional self, the freedom to define his own motivation (*my reason for coming here*), for the cognitive and emotional self, to think and to feel (*to develop some space in my mind-heart*), and for the bodily and individual self, to act (*you have to let the students themselves opt for the degree of hardness*).

4.3 *Suryŏn* as a voluntarily chosen, special path

I chose [suryŏn] myself, and I found it myself, says Cho. This free agency is also a fundamental element of GiCheon practice for the university student Kim Yŏnghŭi and we will now turn to extracts from her interview:

[GiCheon practice and university study] are similar, I think. Because actually they are hard during their completion [...]. But if I want to do it, I do it. And other people around me, for example family and friends, cannot say anything [against that] to me. However, those people also cannot help [with suryŏn]. In any case [...] university study is something you do as self-directed practice, and GiCheon you also do alone. The teacher cannot threaten me [into practicing by saying] “you’ll be punished if you don’t do that” [...]. Because it is something I do [following my own decision]. Suryŏn is something I do by myself, of my own accord. [...] “Suryŏn” is something I want to do, but that process is hard, but I bear it, endure it and develop myself [through it] [...].

For Kim Yŏnghŭi the sense of subjectivity is characteristic of *suryŏn*: you engage in it because you want to, and not because others made you to. In case of Kim Yŏnghŭi, her subjectivity is defined by whether an action is performed freely or under pressure: “do I practice because I want to, or because others force me to?”. For Cho Chinsik subjectivity is defined by the goal of the action: the motivation focused on impressing others changed into *getting some space in my mind-heart*. Kim defines *suryŏn* as a self-directed study, chosen and continued voluntarily. Not every study is *suryŏn*, but only that through which you endure hardship, generate self-development, and to which a high personal value is attached:

Not everything can be suryŏn, because the value I grant [to it] is different. Because for example Spanish is now my major, and my hobby is making cookies. Of course I want to study Spanish and I want to learn how to make cookies, but this one I do with a goal so we

can use the meaning of suryŏn here, and in the case of cookies, I want to learn it, but I do not attach great value to it, it is just something I want to do. So people call things like that hobbies.

The sense of actualized subjectivity Kim developed through the practice is related to her new motivation: doing things because she wants to. However, her GiCheon practice hasn't started that way: *[...] My thoughts changed so much. ... before [engaging with GiCheon practice] I did not have much self-confidence. ... I just went to school in an irresponsible fashion. My father was very stubborn and ... authoritarian and he used to give orders ... Like in the army. ... Father said "do this", "do that". He was also like this about GiCheon, first he said "Let's go!". [So] we had to go. The atmosphere at home was such that we could not say "I do not want to do it". ...*

The father of Kim Yŏnghŭi forced her and her sister Kim Pohŭi (aged thirteen and twelve at the outset) to practice GiCheon against their will. Every morning when he woke them up for practice *it was a battle*, says Kim Yŏnghŭi. Ironically however, it was this involuntary training imposed on the child that resulted in the unfolding of her subjectivity and free will. Years later Kim feels grateful to her father, with whom her relationship has also gradually improved.

But while I was doing GiCheon ... my own thoughts started to appear. Of course I listened to my father, but I did not follow him 100%, not absolutely. ... Because I did what father said I did not have self-confidence. [When my own thoughts started appearing] I developed self-assurance... Suddenly while ... [before this time] I had not done anything extra. [At school] I only studied, [but now] I wanted to play musical instruments, I wanted to learn dancing. I wanted to take part in activities outside the school. I wanted ... to go out with friends. ... What I wanted to do, what I liked ... I discovered things like dreams [of my future] ...

Similarly to Cho, the account of Kim shows her step-by-step realization of how the external influences of the second vector shaped her life. As the first vector was activated, her subjectivity, self-determination and freedom grew; she gained a vision of how unfree she was before, and how her actions and function were actually determined by her surroundings: her family and society. So inversely to the case of Cho, it was the formation of a new self that brought about the realization of the quality of the old self.

With GiCheon Kim started crafting her self along the first vector: discovering and following her own desires, different from the expectations of her family. For Kim, *suryŏn* is not limited to GiCheon practice, but includes also studying Spanish at university. Similarly, her self-crafting process was generated by GiCheon training, stimulated by it, but not limited to it. Used to waking up at dawn in order to join her father and her sister for GiCheon training, Kim now appreciates her habit of waking up early as a valuable asset, and she also started to meditate on a regular basis (as she says in another part of her interview, not quoted here). Her self-crafting likewise included dancing, playing musical instruments, taking part in various activities outside school and going out with friends.

Kim's old self appears "familial" and "social", formed along the second vector without deliberate consideration and without any self-crafting on her part. Her intentional self was very weak – it seems she hardly had any intentions or desires at all, agreeing instead with what her family and her society expected from her and planned for her. Her new self, on the contrary, comes across as intentional, active and strong.

For Kim an important element of *suryŏn* is the endurance of hardship and the self-development that comes from this experience. GiCheon positions are hard and painful to sustain, and this aspect of GiCheon training is referred to by practically all the participants. However Kim takes overcoming pain to the next level. For her the painful exercises are an allegory for possible new projects in life, and her ability to sustain the pain is a source of self-

confidence to accomplish the projects successfully and emerge victorious. The ideas of these possible new projects and endeavors develop, in Kim's opinion, as a part of her GiCheon self-crafting and *suryōn*, unfolding along the first vector.

Through GiCheon ... I started spending more time thinking ... "I want to study that", "I want to live like that", "I will do that": this ... autonomous thinking (chuch'ejōgin saenggak) ... I got self-confidence ... So I got to know what I want. And when I do it, even if it is hard, I can do it till the end without help - I got such ideas. Before that I was just studying because mother and father told me. All my friends did it, so I just followed them. After that, I would just get into some university, graduate. If I could get a job ... I was thinking about my future without real interest. ... Marrying, if I got the chance. I would live somehow... Although it is my life, [I was looking at it] as if it was the life of someone else. But now, I will do what I want, even if it is hard. I will live ...in a determined way. ... Thinking concretely about my future. It is interesting to think about it.

When describing her old self, Kim describes a state of self-alienation: *Although it is my life, [I was looking at it] as if it was the life of someone else.* GiCheon practice, however, brought her subjectivation – Kim calls it autonomous/subjective thinking. She uses the same term *chuch'e* as Cho Chinsik, as discussed in section 4.2. Her confidence and newly acquired sense of self Kim associates with her *naegasinjang* experience:

And each separate thing – it is like doing naegasinjang for twenty minutes. ... In naegasinjang, it is really hard each time ... as if I am dying. But later the mind-heart is relieved, the feeling in the body is ... really good. And these [other things that are like naegasinjang] ... it is hard while I do it, but later ... I get great satisfaction. And it becomes another part of my self-confidence; it helps me. Each time I go up, step by step.

Kim figuratively compares her newly born self-confidence to rebirth after death: *naegasinjang* is hard *as if I am dying*. I return to this point later in Chapter Six. Like many

other GiCheon adepts Kim articulates her *naegasinjang* experience in a symbolic way. For her standing in *naegasinjang* is a metaphor, and each new endeavor in life is the possible object of this metaphor. *Naegasinjang* is hard and painful, yet you feel soothed and relaxed afterwards. Each time the completion of *naegasinjang* is fulfilling for Kim: it builds her self-confidence. And so does the accomplishment of each new venture in life: it is hard while you do it, but you experience triumph after you succeed, and it integrates into your ever-growing sense of self. Kim believes that if she could do something as hard as *naegasinjang*, she could do anything, anything at all: *So when instructor Lee told us to stand in the naegasinjang position for twenty minutes, for thirty minutes, or for one hour, if I could accomplish that till the end, and because I could accomplish that, my self-confidence was boosted. [...] I thought "I can achieve anything!"*.

The leading motif of Kim's account of self-crafting through *suryŏn* is becoming aware of her desires and dreams, and realizing that she is able to follow them. This self-assurance is grounded in the *naegasinjang* experience of overcoming pain and difficulty. But the complex process of self-crafting contains many elements and types of activities. In Kim's case it included *going out with friends, taking part in activities outside school, dancing and playing musical instruments*. An additional important element of self-craft, however, was Kim's exposure to the world of adults in the GiCheon studio. The new self of Kim came into being following her GiCheon practice in the studio. Before starting the training, Kim, as a child, was confined to the route school ↔ home. GiCheon training gave her access to a different world. This was a new experience for her.

We [my sister and me practiced] GiCheon [when we were] in elementary and middle school, so ... we were the youngest, there were many adults [at the studio], of my father's age, men and women. As I looked at the adults ... At school I saw only persons of my own age. Through GiCheon I met many adults. I [saw their] ways of behavior. I got to know the way

people should treat each other. ... “There is also an [adult] world like this” [I realized] through GiCheon. My friends [at school] did not know [this new world] at all. Only I knew [it]. ... And as I mentioned, I started spending more time thinking, alone.

Subsequent to her exposure to the world of adults Kim started perceiving herself not just as a child, but as a member of a wider community of GiCheon practitioners. She learned about the interests and troubles of adults as their world opened in front of her. Her social self was modified, or reborn, as she started realizing herself as a member of GiCheon community which included also her and her sister, but mostly men and women of her parents’ generation. Kim’s “GiCheon social self” was born.

The self-crafting of Kim included her GiCheon practice, and other activities such as dancing, playing musical instruments, and interaction with the world of adults. Her self-confidence grew and her social self expanded. Kim’s new social self manifested also outside of the GiCheon community in Kim’s relationship with other children at school. Now these relationships are marked by more self-confidence.

I was introvert... emotionally I was shrinking ... I did not have self-confidence. ...with GiCheon I got self-assured. My personality also changed ... For example, when I first went to school, I did not have friends or acquaintances ... I did not talk to people first, [hoping that] someone would talk to me, start a conversation.... I did not take any action. But now I have approached them, asking “what is your name?”... Psychologically .. self-confidence was formed. In the past ... if I disliked something, I could not even say that. ... Now if I dislike something [I say] “I dislike that”. ... [Before that] I bore with things (ch’amta).⁷² Because I focused too much on the other person. [I wondered] “if I said ... that I disliked something – what would the other person think of me?” But if we bear with things [like that], the relationship gets worse ... mutual communication does not work. I realize that

⁷²Nancy Abelmann suggests this translation of *ch’amta*, as I have noted in Chapter Two.

[now]. [...] With friends, I was watching them closely, trying to read their minds (nunch'i pogi). If I did this and that, what would she think of me? Should I do this? Should I do that? I was looking for an answer, but there is no answer [to this question]. I just have to do my best. If I like that friend and I treat her well, it will turn out all right for me. And so I got more friends. [...] I realized that if I treated people well, I would get more friends, even though they are not my friends now.

GiCheon made Kim bear with things less and talk more, bringing better communication. Her social self, related to her school functioning, was modified along the first vector, following her self-crafting process. She became more open, and started expressing directly her likes and dislikes, acquiring more friends at school.

Kim's slightly philosophical understanding of *suryōn* as a personally important study is supported by other GiCheon practitioners. Here is how Chang Namju talks about this: *In my case, I spent three years here [in the GiCheon studio], and will spend more [time here]. [...] I tell people around me [...] that there is a good suryōn method called GiCheon. We use the expression suryōn, but when I talk to those people I use the expression undong. Suryōn has a bit different meaning from undong, doesn't it? [...] In [the word] suryōn different messages [...], individually important values are included. Something that makes me grow, [...] a philosophical spiritual element for self-perfection [...]. The expression undong relates only to the body, health, etc. of the person. So for ordinary people [...] the expression suryōn is difficult to accept [...]. [...] For ordinary people the word suryōn means something [that only] very special people do [...]. So when I talk with them [I try to show that suryōn] is not something [only] special people do. Every person is special, [...] I use the word undong in order to lower the threshold. [...] [I tell them] "if you are interested, come and try [GiCheon practice]"*.

For Chang, *suryŏn* contains a philosophical, spiritual element of self-growth and self-perfection, and individually important values. This echoes Kim Yŏnghŭi's vision of *suryŏn* as a difficult process of self-development, personally selected and personally meaningful. From Chang's narrative it seems that his understanding of *suryŏn* is shared by people around him. Ordinary people associate *suryŏn* with *something [that only] very special people do*, this is why Chang does not use the word *suryŏn* when advertising GiCheon to others, in order to not scare them away.

GiCheon trainees often discuss the difficulty of bringing new people to a GiCheon studio and keeping them practicing there. This difficulty is usually attributed to the fact that the positions are hard and painful. Yet, this hardship has positive moments for Kim Yŏnghŭi and for Pak Kyŏngae, to whose interview we now turn. Pak Kyŏngae, a bank team manager in her fifties at the time of the interview, talks about *suryŏn* mainly in the context of the endurance of hardship. Pak also refers to the concept of *ch'amta*, but her perception is different from Kim's.

4.4 *Suryŏn* as endurance of hardship

"Suryŏn" is something I want to do, but that process is hard, but I bear it, endure it and develop myself [through it] says Kim Yŏnghŭi. For bank team manager Pak Kyŏngae sustaining hardship and performing purification are the main characteristics of GiCheon *suryŏn*, as demonstrated in this extract from her interview:

-GiCheon is really good sports (undong). [...] It is actually suryŏn, not undong.

-What is suryŏn, in your opinion?

-Suryŏn? [...] Suryŏn is the cleansing (takkkko kanŭn kŏt) of body and mind-heart together. [...] Habits or wrong things are corrected [...]. And the mind-heart also [...] - through the process of making it bright?. To suppress bad feelings, to feel more secure [...] relaxed? [...]

The ability to maintain the mind-heart in a relaxed state ... [...] When one is relaxed because she is lucky and has no troubles [...] - but this is not always possible for a human being. In life everyone has troubles. But despite of these troubles the act of staying calm and peaceful – is suryōn. This is also true of the body, [...] the pain of the physical should be manageable. Suryōn is bringing yourself to the level where you can manage your pain. Even if it hurts, to be able to handle your condition, or just to accept the fact that it hurts. [...] We cannot correct everything [...]. Even if it is a bit uncomfortable, we have to go with it together.

For Pak *suryōn* is an exercise in cleansing the wrong habits of the body and *brightening the mind-heart - suppressing bad feelings*. The idea of cleansing the wrong habits of the body reminds us of the interpretation of *suryōn* given by Cho Chinsik and by Yi T'aegyōng. However for Pak, *suppressing and managing the pain* are central, describing her striving for self-modification. The concepts of patience and endurance evoked by Pak are all tinged with the idea of suppression To accept the hard, the painful, the uncomfortable, *to be able to handle your condition* and *cleanse the mind-body*, these are the outcomes of her GiCheon training. Another extract from her interview continues in a similar vein:

... In family relationships... I learned to bear things (ch'amta) better. Before that I would be fighting... But with family, you have to accept things because there is no choice. ... It is not something you can solve by fighting. We have to accept things and let them go, with GiCheon suryōn I learned to do it a little bit better. [...]. So while my tolerance for stress has increased, I can now maintain continuously what is important for me and my strength to go forward has increased ...

In her interview Pak Kyōngae also talks about the difficulty of maintaining a highly demanding career and simultaneously functioning as a mother and a wife in contemporary South Korea. Her various tasks are not easy to combine and her life is full of stress. For Pak,

GiCheon *suryŏn* is a stress-relieving method. It helps her to bear what she has to bear, she observes that with GiCheon her *ch'amta* potential and her strength have grown.

Ch'amta, bearing with things, is a common expression in the Korean language that is often used by women when discussing relationships and attitudes (Abelmann 2003: 74-77, 82-86, 172), as mentioned in Chapter Two. For Pak, *ch'amta* is forbearance, the product of her emotional stability and peace of mind. This is her resistance against hardship in an attempt to maintain her self-integrity. For Pak, *ch'amta* lies along the first vector, this is what she chooses and aspires to, and this is what her GiCheon *suryŏn* is about. Kim Yŏnghŭi, however, interprets *ch'amta* differently. In the experience of Kim, *ch'amta* is associated with Kim's older, pre-modified self, formed along the second vector. *Ch'amta* is what Kim did before she gained self-confidence. By *ch'amta* Kim means holding back, keeping silent and lacking self-expression. She contrasts this with more outgoing communication supported by her newly found self-confidence. So for Kim Yŏnghŭi *suryŏn* led to an escape from *ch'amta* behavior, while for Pak *suryŏn* led to an increase in *ch'amta* ability.

In the interview, Pak Kyŏngae shows aspirations to develop a contemplative view on life, to learn acceptance and reconciliation. These intentions lie along the first vector and relate to her mind-set, her emotions and cognition, her body, and to her family relationships. But the hardships Pak is confronting are coming from the outside; they are the forces of the second vector she attempts to counteract. This is achieved by building a stronger self, one capable of forbearance and determination. *My tolerance for stress has increased, I can now maintain continuously what is important for me and my strength to go forward has increased.* This is how Pak describes her struggle with the difficulties of life, a struggle carried out along the first vector of progression. GiCheon helps her in this struggle, also enhancing her efficiency as a worker:

I often go on business trips. ... If I practice GiCheon for thirty, forty minutes before sleeping, I sleep really well and the time difference is not a problem ... And the next day when I wake up my body is light. ... After you are in the airplane for twelve hours, you are tired. The tiredness of the body is immediately relieved. ... The feeling in the body changes, and the time difference is not felt much. ... My colleague was getting out into the park, and I was solving this problem staying inside the room. ... These are very economical exercises. The space ... even a little bit of space is enough. The time ... if you practice ... just twenty, thirty minutes, you feel relaxed. For busy people who do not have time, it is the best physical activity. ...

GiCheon *suryōn* helps Pak to overcome jetlag on business trips, thus enhancing her work performance as a team manager at a bank. In addition, *suryōn* for Pak involves developing better *ch'amta* ability and better functioning as a mother. In short, she presents GiCheon *suryōn* as the ideal practice for the modern office worker. Besides perfecting herself personally, Pak attempts to help other women around her to cultivate themselves.

I suggested ... practicing GiCheon ... to my [...] junior colleagues ... Through GiCheon I managed my stress. ... I cultivated courage, confidence. Something like spiritual stability. So I recommended GiCheon to my junior female colleagues, because in this society women easily get hurt. ... So from that point of view ... GiCheon could be good ... But they do not listen. ... I have many young female junior colleagues.

Pak thinks GiCheon *suryōn* is good for women, for it makes them stronger. She talks about women as socially vulnerable: *in this society women easily get hurt*. GiCheon could be a remedy for that, as it cultivates *courage, confidence and spiritual stability*. However, younger bank workers do not listen to Pak and show no inclination to join. Nevertheless, for Park, recommending GiCheon, not only to her colleagues at work but also to other women, is important. Two years after starting the practice she has written a short text on her GiCheon

experiences, a copy of which I received. In the concluding part Pak proposes trying GiCheon “especially to women in their early forties who feel that their bodies are not like before”, as GiCheon makes “the mind-heart peaceful and the body strong”. Through GiCheon she attempts to stimulate women to brave social circumstances which she perceives as challenging, to cultivate the “female social self”.

4.5 *Suryōn* as purification

The imagery of *suryōn* as the *cleansing of body and mind-heart*, which came up in the beginning of Pak Kyōngae’s interview extract, is accepted by most GiCheon practitioners. Kwōn Kuho explains it through a few concrete metaphors:

Suryōn means “cleansing” (뒀는 tangnūn) [...], it is like washing a plate after eating. [...] In the body murky ki is accumulated [...], it is like getting rid of this ki. In life, murky ki occurs because of stress, or from food. [...] If water [...] is disturbed, it gets murky [...]. If you throw soil into water, it becomes muddy. But if the water flows, it purifies, because of circulation. [...] GiCheon suryōn or other kinds of suryōn are similar. If ki is circulating, any murky substance is washed away, and good ki is accumulated [...].

Here Kwōn relates to a popular metaphor in orally transmitted GiCheon philosophy which compares *ki* in the human body to flowing water. Stress or unwholesome food stains the *ki* and makes it murky. GiCheon *suryōn*, however, makes the *ki* flow. Similarly to running water, through flowing *ki* gets purified. GiCheon theory compares the human to a lake which is connected to other lakes by routes and channels. A certain amount of water (*ki* manifesting as blood and lymph, awareness, consciousness, sensibility and in other forms) circulates within the lake; new water constantly comes in, and some water breaks away. As the new water (*ki* manifesting also as food, sensations, experiences, perceived words and actions of others etc.) comes in, there is a constant need to purify the water. There always will be bad

water left and some stagnation cannot be avoided. But the relative amount of bad and stagnant water can be reduced, in an attempt to achieve better circulation, the goal of GiCheon practice.

GiCheon stances are supposed to facilitate smooth passage of *ki* through the body and mind-heart – allowing food and liquids to be absorbed easily, sweat and excrements to leave the body comfortably, thoughts and emotions to be perceived and realized efficiently, and words to be said and actions to be performed with greater straightforwardness and simplicity.⁷³ In GiCheon thought this is addressed as *ki* flow and metaphorically compared to the circulation of water. As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, these ideas have much in common with traditional Korean medicine, and are interiorized and articulated by many trainees.

4.6 *Suryŏn* as cultivating the social body

This is how GiCheon practitioner Kim Yŏngbo talks about *suryŏn* as purification: *The word suryŏn (修練) consists of two characters: su (修) – to cleanse, and ryŏn (練) – to purify/to discipline. This means to cleanse my body and mind-heart, to repeat this endlessly, through naegasinjang, tanbaegong, the six basic positions, then through our dynamic disciplines and sword art [...], to practice steadily and perfect myself.*⁷⁴ That is *suryŏn*.

Kim talks about *suryŏn* as cleansing and purification, stressing its continuous, infinite quality. Body and mind-heart should be polished perpetually and steadily, bringing the perfection of the self. As many other trainees, Kim does not intend to perfect his individual self only.

⁷³ I discuss the motif of “straightforwardness and simplicity” in greater detail in Chapter Five, referring to it as “smooth and effortless passage”.

⁷⁴ Mr. Kim uses here the expression *nae chasinŭl pparaganŭn kŏt*, literally “washing myself”, in the sense of “perfecting myself”.

In a larger sense [...] in Korea GiCheon is still unknown [...]. So in order to make it more widely known [...] ... if one has something good [...] one should never sink into self-satisfaction, alone. [...] One should share it with the others, then the value [of this good thing] can double [...]. In Korea still, if we say “GiCheon” [...] [it is less known] than other martial arts or so [...], it's a shame.

Kim Yŏngbo aspires to cultivate the social self, opening GiCheon to a wider population. He sees it as his obligation, and as countering individual self-satisfaction. The motif of GiCheon *suryŏn* as self-perfection starting on the level of the individual body but going on toward the cultivation of the body of the society, is time and again emphasized in GiCheon books. *Suryŏn* should be carried out not for individual interests alone, but also for society. An ideal GiCheon practitioner is cultivating herself for the purpose of personal health, advancement and enlightenment, while actively contributing to the development of South Korea (Kim Hŭisang and Kich‘ŏnmun Ponmun ed. 2000: 10, 38-39).

The idea of developing the social self also comes up in the interviews of Cho Chinsik, Kim Yŏnghŭi and Pak Kyŏngae. Cho Chinsik relates to the social self of his GiCheon group, when he tries to awaken in them the same process his teacher Kim Hŭisang activated in him. Kim Yŏnghŭi develops her school self when she wins over more friends and improves her relationships with them. She also discovers her GiCheon social self when she identifies with adults practicing by her side in the studio, a point we touched upon in this chapter and also in Chapter Three. Pak Kyŏngae expresses attempts to attract other women to GiCheon, to support and strengthen their common female self, composed firstly of her younger female colleagues at the bank, and secondly of other South Korean women around her. According to GiCheon books, this is what *suryŏn* is and should be about. And this is close to what Kim Yŏngbo means: do not practice for your personal gain, share with others, and the value of what you have will double.

4.7 Applying the two vectors model

In this chapter I have applied the two vectors model in my analysis of the experiences of the practitioners. I have portrayed the resistance of the first vector achieved through GiCheon practice against the second vector; intentional subjective drives that attempt to counterbalance external, unconsciously absorbed influences. But we have to bear in mind that according to an alternative understanding the function of GiCheon practice itself might sometimes be categorized as fitting the second vector, and not the first. This is the case when we look at the change in motivation: the intention behind the practice – and sometimes the intentions behind other actions unrelated to the practice – is modified by the fact and reality of practice itself.

The narrative of Cho Chinsik shows that initially he had a strong inclination to objectify himself. “How do others see me from the outside?”, “How does my training look from the outside; do I appear to perform the exercises well?” were the questions that troubled him. He was pre-occupied with the gaze flowing along the second vector from the outside toward the inside. The intervention of his teacher Kim Hŭisang changed that. After a short exchange with his teacher, Cho started practicing for himself. The direction of the flow from the external toward the internal changed toward the external from the internal. The teacher was the catalyst for this change, an active carrying signal that caused the transference from the second vector to the first. The “Other” thus served as a vehicle for transfer between the two vectors.⁷⁵ The ability to observe and modify his habits and his way of thinking comes about through the active and intentional interference of the first vector into the work of the

⁷⁵ However, if we consider GiCheon practice itself as an “external influence” administered on the self of Cho, then we might also categorize the change of his intention as having been impacted by the external. This is also true for the experience of Kim Yŏnghŭi.

second vector, old patterns were formed unconsciously but now they are visualized and intentionally modified.

Kim Yŏnghŭi in the beginning felt the impact of the realm of the external; her authoritative father and her mother seemingly decided her life for her. Her own agency was rather weak. Kim's father, who brought her to the GiCheon studio, and the practice in which he made her engage were the catalysts that caused Kim to develop her internal self. Accordingly, she developed free agency and successfully passed from a state in which she was impacted upon and controlled by externalities to one in which her internal drive is decisive.

In the case of Pak Kyŏngae we see that she had a strong actualized self from the start. Pak talks a great deal about suppressing, overcoming and becoming peaceful in spite of pain. Notwithstanding her agency, her internal self still seems to be troubled by life. She therefore utilizes GiCheon as a tool for developing internal strength further to cope with external conditions and uses it to advance the resistive capacity of her own agency against externalities.

The notion of *suryŏn* as purification emphasized by Kwŏn Kuho likewise involves transference from the second vector to the first. Purification or cleansing through conscious directed effort implies overcoming a murky state which came about without the intention of the self.

4.8 Applying Foucault's technologies of self

Foucault's concept of technologies of the self which I use to approach GiCheon involves questioning and inquiring about self-formation. The problem of forming the self opens on two analytical levels. When it comes to the timescale, the first level of analysis is the past. What is my old self? What pushed it into being? Who am I and how did I come to appear like

this? This is an inquiry into the old, pre-modified self. The second analytical level ventures into the future. What do I want to develop into and who am I becoming? This is an examination of a new, potential self, and its possible trajectories of progress. On a theoretical and methodological level these are two different questions, one relating to the past, the other querying the future. Yet, for the self and its relation to the world, the past and the future intersect and merge in the present moment.

The story of Cho Chinsik related above demonstrates that the realization of the qualities of the old self and the coming to life of a new self sometimes take place simultaneously, in the present moment. The moment I see the old self, it changes. This is when the moment of self-knowledge turns into a moment of self-transformation. A different dynamic is revealed in the story of Kim Yŏnghŭi, though. For her, self-modification preceded self-realization. Only after her old self was left behind, her newly formed self became aware of what her old self had previously been. As to Pak Kyŏngae, for her the notion of self-knowledge, it seems, did not constitute an issue at all. Both her previous self and her desired future self were visible to her current self clearly. For Pak, what was at stake was developing the ability to bear the burdens of life with dignity, and to successfully progress from the old self toward the new self, strong and forbearing.

In this chapter I have followed the development of the intentional, emotional, cognitive, physical, familial and social selves in the transformative progress undertaken by a number of GiCheon practitioners. In this context the notions of the Other, of returning to the source, of freedom, hardship and purification underlined by Foucault in his conceptualization of the technologies of self (2001: 16, 83, 92, 123-130, 167, 476-477) are important for anchoring my analysis.

In his research on the techniques of self-change and self-modification Foucault has established the essentiality of these moments or elements as particular techniques which I

have identified in the narratives of the practitioners. We have examined how these vehicles of self-transformation are accounted for and utilized by the trainees, both in their direct experience and in its articulation. The first is the presence of the Other and her or his role. Foucault stresses that only through an active involvement of the Other can the moment of self-alteration take place (Foucault 2001: 123-130). The presence of the Other, as a technique for self-transformation, manifests in the narration of Cho Chinsik.

Another element Foucault defines as central to self-formation is a return to the source. Time and again he reiterates the idea of going back to the origin in his discussion on self-care (2001: 92, 476-477). Chronologically, this return to the source can also be interpreted as going back in time. This also shows in the narration of Cho Chinsik, when he talks about *becoming a young child*. This motif of recollected or imagined “original purity” is also articulated by Kim Yŏnghŭi when she talks about her *desire to maintain her original intention* in an extract from her interview quoted in Chapter Three.

An important moment in self-formation discussed by Foucault in his account of self-care in ancient Greece and Rome is the notion of freedom and free choice (2001: 83, 128, 477), manifesting actively in the narrations of Cho Chinsik and Kim Yŏnghŭi. Foucault stresses also the aspect of hardship as central to the techniques of self-development (2001: 46, 146). Hardship is emphasized in the narrations of Kim Yŏnghŭi and Pak Kyŏngae. For Foucault, bearing hardship is often linked to cleansing and purification (2001: 16, 167). As I have clarified in section 4.1 of this chapter, the theme of cleansing is already present in the word *suryŏn* itself. Kwŏn Kuho elaborates on this aspect in section 4.5.

Looking at the inner connections of these symbolic means, we notice the links between the Other and freedom, between hardship and purification, and between purification and returning to the source. The metaphor of the self as imprisoned within a cell is common to many traditions of self-cultivation. If the self is inside the cell, it cannot get out. Only the

Other can unlock the cell from the outside and thus assist the self with gaining freedom. As to purification and hardship, the common motif is that a dirty thing is hard to clean, and the cleansing process is painful and uncomfortable for the thing, like a cloth that is being washed, as Kim Yǒngbo says in the extract from his interview (footnote 13). The cleansing also constitutes a return to an “originally clean” state of the self, hence its connection with the return to the origin, emphasized by Cho Chinsik.

I have begun to elaborate on the purification aspect of *suryǒn* and how it is explained in GiCheon theory in the section 4.5. We have seen that this point is critical for many practitioners, and it is often verbalized by them. The discourse of hardship as purifying and restoring the flow of *ki* will continue in the following chapters, particularly in Chapter Six in the context of pain in GiCheon.

4.9 Attitudes toward *suryǒn* as personally colored experiential modalities

As I have discussed in the Introduction, the study of the interviews for the purpose of writing this dissertation has made me realize that each practitioner has a narrative direction or narrative inclination in her or his account, which I decided to call experiential modalities. We can trace this narrative tendency also in the stories discussed in this chapter. For Cho the leading theme of his account was gaining an understanding of his old behavioral patterns, a technique of self-knowledge and self-transformation he utilized later as a teacher. Cho became a GiCheon teacher himself, and in describing his GiCheon experience he stressed the role of his teacher Kim Hŭisang – the teacher’s role is central to Cho’s account. Cho Chinsik thinks, speaks and conceptualizes as a teacher, as someone whose task is to gain understanding and pass it on. The way Cho reflects on what GiCheon brought to him, on his role, the way he frames GiCheon practice shows that being a teacher forms his experience and narrative. Becoming and being a teacher defines his narrative direction.

For Kim Yŏnghŭi, the main motif of her interpretation and articulation of her experience was self-awareness and self-actualization. She perceived her wishes and desires as distinct of those of her parents. Kim Yŏnghŭi, a university student in her early twenties at the time of the interview, recalls the process and progress of adolescence developing into adulthood. As much as her development and increasing awareness of herself come from her GiCheon practice, they also come from being a growing child and a maturing teenager. These factors form and impact her narrative tendency. The aspect of aging while being engaged in GiCheon is remarked upon by other trainees. When you practice for a number of years, your GiCheon practice becomes part of life. If you generate wisdom and enlightenment, it is difficult to differentiate where they originate. Do they come because of GiCheon practice or because of the passing of the years?

For Pak Kyŏngae, the third protagonist of the current chapter, the focus of her narration lay in her ability to bear pain and move forward nevertheless. She emphasizes the qualities of fortitude and forbearance, these are the qualities she cultivates and aspires to. Her narrative tendency is largely influenced by the fact that she is a middle-aged female company worker, having to multi-task and deal with stress.

The next chapter pursues a few additional themes or directions of personally colored experiential modalities in the interviews. For example for Sin Hyŏnju, one of the protagonists of Chapter Five, it is the notion of a “smooth and effortless passage”, connected to ideas of warmth, smoothness and good communication. This motif was mostly activated in her communication with her parents. This is Sin’s narrative direction, and “smooth and effortless passage” is the personally colored experiential modality central to her account.